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SUBJECT: CROATIA REACTION: 2003 TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
REPORT

1. (SBU) We were called in to the Foreign Ministry on June 13 to discuss the recently released 2003 Trafficking in Persons report. Dubravka Simonovic, Head of the Human Rights section in the Department for UN and Human Rights, asked for an explanation of why Croatia was placed as a tier 2 country in the Department's 2003 Trafficking in Persons report. She observed that to be included in the report a country would have to have a significant number of trafficking victims, defined as not less than 100 victims. She then pointed out that there have been eight victims in Croatia, a number that is agreed upon by NGOs, international organizations, and the GOC.

2. (SBU) We explained that the assessment of a "significant" number of victims was based not just on the number of known victims, but also on the number of women trafficked into Western Europe, the number of women trafficked from source countries, the fact that one of the three known routes from source countries to Western Europe goes through Croatia, and the fact that the police deport many women without ever questioning how they got into Croatia. Based on these factors, we think its reasonable that a significant number of victims are trafficked through Croatia. Simonovic summarized that our assessment was based on an "assumption," and we need more credible data. Besides challenging us on the data, she also questioned where Bosnia and Serbia and Montenegro were on the report, and wanted to know why Macedonia was a tier 1 country "when they have a much bigger problem than we do."

3. (SBU) Despite the disagreement over numbers, Simonovic affirmed that Croatia had the political will to address the problem of trafficking, and that it wishes to work closely with us to address the issue. She asked what they needed to do to come into compliance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. We provided her with a summary of activities and deadlines from Croatia's National Action Plan to suppress trafficking, approved by the GOC last November, and pointed out how little had been implemented in the intervening time period. She admitted that the deadlines were not realistic and that this issue needed to be addressed by the National Committee. She further bemoaned the limited availability of GOC funding for trafficking activities, yet assured us that the ministries allocate additional funding beyond the approximately \$16,000 available through the Government Human Rights Office for trafficking activities.

4. (SBU) We later met with Ivana Werft, Secretary to the National Committee for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons. Werft has been a willing and able interlocutor on trafficking issues, and has worked to bridge the gap between NGO activists and the GOC on trafficking issues. Like Simonovic, Werft was concerned with the report's finding that Croatia has a significant problem of over 100 cases of trafficking when all agree that there have been eight identified victims. To illustrate the problems connected with transit and identification of trafficking, she rhetorically asked what border police can do, and what data can be gleaned from a situation, when, for example, police stop, question, and then send on their way young women from the Balkans who are legally transiting Croatia and say they are en route to a job in Western Europe. Werft pointed out that of the eight known victims in Croatia, two had been identified while transiting Croatia, a testimony to increased awareness and training.

Comment

5. (U) The very nature of the crime of trafficking creates serious obstacles in terms of compiling accurate and reliable data, particularly in countries that are believed to be primarily transit countries. All those working on the issue locally recognize the problem of a lack of data, yet NGOs and the International Office for Migration (IOM) have and continue to request donor funding solely for awareness raising and prevention activities. Our requests to the Stability Pact for examples or models of good data collection

projects have not met with success.

16. (U) We had prepared both Simonovic and Werft in advance for the tier 2 listing. In part due to our aggressive engagement on the issue -- for months we took every opportunity to forewarn that we anticipated Croatia may be listed as a tier 2 country -- both Simonovic and Werft told us they were not surprised at the listing and had in fact expected it.

17. (SBU) Despite the challenges to us on the numbers, the tier 2 placement has had the predictable effect of sharpening the GOC's focus on the issue. Simonovic specifically stated that the issue is now a priority for the GOC because the IC has made it a priority. As with refugee and return and reintegration issues, where the international community focuses, the GOC responds. We will strive to maintain their attention on this issue in the hope that increased GOC funding and meaningful activities will result.

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